

A photograph of the interior of the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center. The space is bright and modern, featuring a high ceiling with a large skylight. In the foreground, there are several round tables with chairs, likely a waiting area or a staff lounge. In the background, there are reception desks and more tables. The overall atmosphere is clean and professional.

University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center

Nation's busiest veterinary teaching hospital improves staff communication, safety and mobility

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– **Pat Berzins**

Director of Operations
University of Minnesota
Veterinary Medical Center

The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center (VMC) is the nation's busiest veterinary teaching hospital, treating more than 35,000 companion and 4,000 large animal cases annually, with specialists available in all areas of medicine and surgery. With 16 specialty areas, state-of-the-art equipment and 24/7 availability, VMC offers a full-service care center for pets, horses and farm animals.

Identifying a Wi-Fi communication solution

A progressive veterinary teaching hospital, VMC is always looking for innovative ways to improve operational efficiencies and animal care. In fact, it is the first veterinarian teaching hospital to use Vocera technology. Hospital leaders collaborated with another University of Minnesota department to purchase and expand the Vocera system. The Residential Life department on campus faced similar staff communication challenges caused by steel and concrete infrastructures that made it difficult for staff to connect on cellular devices. In 2015, the facilities coordinator at the University of Minnesota saw the wearable Vocera communication device in action at a local hospital where his wife was giving birth to their first child. He knew the hands-free communication solution that ran on Wi-Fi was exactly what he and his team needed to improve staff connectivity and satisfaction. It was exactly what the VMC needed, too.

Ensuring staff safety

VMC sought to improve care team communication, collaboration, satisfaction and safety. Prior to implementing Vocera technology, the hospital was using one-way pagers and push-to-talk phones. In addition to unreliable connectivity, the pagers and hand-held phones made it difficult for staff to get help in serious situations with large animals.

“If one of our team members is in a stall working on a horse, and suddenly the animal pins the provider against a wall, he or she needs a reliable and fast way to call for help using their voice,” said Pat Berzins, Director of Operations at VMC. “The hands-free feature of the Vocera device is a very valuable safety benefit for the staff.”

The hospital finds the active staff directory and group calling features to be particularly useful so staff can reach the right person in a particular department without needing to refer to on-call charts or duty rosters. The ability to call by name, department or job function using the Vocera communication device eliminates the need for mobile staff to remember multiple phone numbers. It has significantly cut down on communication confusion and helps ensure animals are properly triaged in a timely manner.

“Finally, a dependable way to get a hold of someone when you really need it!” said Sheryl Ferguson, Large Animal Manager at VMC. “Our large animal isolation is in a sub-basement, and always struggled with communication in that area. Because the Vocera system connects to Wi-Fi, it has made large animal case management safer. We can have peace-of-mind sending someone down to isolation knowing that if trouble arises, there is help with the push of a button.”

Removing uncertainty from communication

Within six months of deploying Vocera technology, the hospital doubled its number of Vocera communication devices throughout the facility. The Vocera mobile application is used by physicians when they are inside and outside the hospital, so they can stay connected when they aren't wearing a Vocera device. The secure texting solution enhances care team collaboration and integrates seamlessly with the wearable Vocera device. Veterinary medicine students are able to send patient photos to veterinary physicians over the secure mobile app, so veterinary physicians can review animal cases when they're off campus.

"Our staff members love the desktop interface," said Ferguson. "They can see if and when their messages have been sent, delivered and read. In the past, we had many delayed messages with some of them not going through for one to two days. The Vocera app removes the uncertainty about whether a text message was reliably sent or just lingering out there in cyberspace."

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University of Minnesota
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email info@vocera.com

or call **+1 888 9VOCERA**

Vocera, now part of Stryker

3030 Orchard Parkway

San Jose CA, 95134

t: +1 408 882 5100

f: +1 408 882 5101

toll free: +1 888 9VOCERA

[vocera.com](https://www.vocera.com)